

Guidance Note on UNA-UK policy-making process

22 June 2010

How is UNA-UK's policy decided?

UNA-UK has four policy programmes: the Millennium Development Goals and sustainable development, human rights and humanitarian action, peace and security, and UN reform, institutions and governance.

The Association's work on these programmes is shaped by the three-year overall strategic framework adopted by its policy-making conferences (the framework for 2008-11 adopted at Annual Conference 2008 in Exeter is included for reference at the end of this document).

UNA-UK's policy on specific issues that fall within the wider scope of the four policy programmes is also debated and agreed at its policy-making conferences. Once adopted, these motions become official UNA-UK policy and are recorded in a 'policy document' that is sent to the entire membership, as well as key individuals in government departments and other NGOs. Policy documents for the last five years are available online at www.una.org.uk or by contacting our Membership Officer.

What happens after policies are adopted?

These policies guide the work of the Board, its Policy Sub-Committee and the UNA-UK Secretariat and the UNA-UK membership – none of these bodies should undertake advocacy or activities that contradict policy adopted by Conference. Motions adopted by these conferences remain UNA-UK's policy until an updated motion on a particular issue is proposed and adopted at a subsequent policy-making conference.

The number of issues that make up UNA-UK's policies is large (substantive motions on nearly 50 topics and issues were adopted at Annual Conference 2009). Therefore, the Secretariat prioritises work according to the three-year strategic framework and funding and financial constraints. The Secretariat also seeks opportunities to partner with other organisations on issues that it otherwise would not have the resources to work on.

Who acts on UNA-UK's policy?

UNA-UK's policy is acted on by the Secretariat – in consultation with the Board of Directors, in particular its Policy Advisory Sub-Committee **as well as** UNA members, branches, regions and nations.

With a small staff team and resource constraints, the Secretariat cannot work with the same degree of intensity on all issues adopted at policy-making conferences. It relies on UNA members, branches, regions and nations to undertake campaigning and advocacy work at a local level, e.g. by lobbying MPs, organising events and so on, to take forward the policies agreed at UNA-UK's policy-making conferences.

As a grassroots membership organisation, one of UNA-UK's strengths is that it can draw on its member and supporter networks – branches and youth groups in all four nations of the UK – to campaign with one voice. To this end, the Secretariat tries to equip UNA members to act, by providing information in *New World* magazine, action points in its monthly e-newsletter and sample advocacy letters on its website.

Members are welcome to contact the Secretariat for advice on particular issues. Staff members are happy to provide guidance to help members take action, and also to send reference material (such as letters sent by our Chair, Lord Hannay, to government ministers or articles from *New World* and other media).

What about issues that are not covered by UNA-UK's existing policy?

Many of the policies agreed at UNA-UK's policy-making conferences cover broad categories (e.g. the UN human rights system, sustainable development) reflect long-term aims (e.g. a world without nuclear weapons, poverty eradication, an end to violence against women). But given the wide remit of the UN, there will inevitably be issues of interest to members that are not covered by existing UNA-UK policy. Likewise, members may wish to take action in response to world events arising in between policy-making conferences – such as the earthquake in Haiti or an unexpected military attack in the Middle East.

In both cases, members are encouraged to:

- 1) **check the UNA-UK website** (or contact the Secretariat if you don't have access to the internet) to find out whether UNA-UK already has a stance on the issue and to see whether any action has already been taken.

UNA-UK's Chair, Lord Hannay, the officers of the Board and its Policy Committee communicate regularly, and it is likely that they may have formulated a position on the issue in question or have taken action such as e.g. writing to the UK government, circulating a funding appeal, posting a news story etc.

- 2) **contact the staff.** If members are unable to find information they are looking for, they should contact the Secretariat as staff may be able to provide an update or find the relevant information.

Members are encouraged to make use of the information UNA-UK has prepared e.g. adapting letters to government written by Lord Hannay to lobby their MPs, circulating 'do something' campaign action points, etc.

If your issue is not already being covered, please read the section below.

What action should members take if an issue is not already being addressed?

There are three reasons why the UNA-UK Board of Directors and Secretariat may not currently be taking action on a given issue:

a) The issue falls outside the scope of UNA-UK's mandate

With so many NGOs working on peace, development and human rights issues, UNA-UK adds value by maintaining a strong focus on the UN. According to UNA-UK's Articles of Association related to the eligibility criteria for policy-making:

"a motion is deemed to be in order if it is addressed to or requires action by Her Majesty's Government, the British Parliament, The European Council of Ministers and Parliament, the UN, the Secretary-General of the UN or appropriate executive officers of UN Agencies, the Commonwealth, the World Federation of United Nations, Associations or the Board of Directors, Branches, Members, Corporate Members, Affiliate Organisations or the British Public: and shall explicitly relate to the furtherance of one or more of the purposes of the United Nations or any of its subsidiary organisations or to matters before, or which might come before, the United Nations or such subsidiary organisations."

If an issue is solely concerned, for example, with UK domestic policy, then it would not be eligible for consideration as UNA-UK's official policy.

Example of eligible issue: the UK's position on establishing an international fuel bank overseen by the IAEA to allow access to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

Example of issue that falls outside the scope: promoting nuclear energy as the solution to the UK's growing domestic energy consumption needs.

b) The issue falls within the scope of UNA-UK's mandate but isn't a priority at present

Due to staff and resource constraints, the Board and its Policy Sub-Committee work with the Secretariat to translate the policies agreed at UNA-UK's policy-making conferences into priorities, based on the three-year strategic framework agreed by the membership. In practice, this means that not all motions adopted at policy-making conferences can necessarily be acted on by the staff (though in recent years a high proportion have been!).

However, UNA members, branches, regions and nations are encouraged to take action on these issues at a local level, by lobbying MPs, organising events, carrying out petitions etc. If members would like advice, help or resources, they should contact the UNA-UK staff, who would be more than happy to help.

c) The issue relates to a sudden/unexpected event

If such an issue arises and members feel it requires action at the national level by UNA-UK, there is a simple process for transmitting concerns.

- i) check the UNA-UK website (or contact the Secretariat) to ensure that action is not in the pipeline
- ii) send an email or letter with a brief summary of the issue to Natalie Samarasinghe (samarasinghe@una.org.uk or by post to UNA-UK, 3 Whitehall Court, London SW1A 2EL)
- iii) the staff will transmit your concerns to the Chair of the Policy Committee
- iv) if the issue meets the eligibility criteria (see above) and is time sensitive, the relevant officers of the Board (UNA-UK's Chair and the Chair of the Policy Committee) will discuss whether urgent action is required e.g. a letter to be sent immediately to the Foreign Secretary

If it is not time sensitive, it will be placed on the agenda of the next meeting of the Policy Committee.

Please note that if the request reaches us less than two weeks before the next meeting of the Committee, it may have to wait until the meeting after that. Dates of the Policy Committee meetings are available online or by contacting James Kearney on 020 7766 3446 or kearney@una.org.uk

- v) the Committee will consider the issue at its meeting. If the Committee and the Chair of UNA-UK are in agreement that action should be taken, the Chair of UNA-UK may raise an issue with government departments, Ministers or in Parliament.

If the issue is not straightforward, then the Committee may refer the matter to the Board of Directors, which will consider it at its next meeting. Dates of Board meetings are available online or by contacting Georgina Banks on 020 7766 3457 or banks@una.org.uk

The members (or branch, region, nation) who have raised the issue will be informed of the action that has been taken.

For reference: Overall strategic framework for UNA-UK's policy work for the period 2008-2011

Adopted by Annual Conference 2008

UNA-UK will continue its four programme priorities for the period 2008-2011:

- i. implementation of the UN Millennium Development Goals, with the next 12 months focused on progress towards fulfilling earlier MDG commitments and the UN's role in international negotiations on climate change*
- ii. human rights and humanitarian action, with the next 12 months focused on the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the performance of the Human Rights Council; and the implementation of the principle of 'the responsibility to protect'*
- iii. international peace and security, including disarmament, with the next 12 months focused on enhancing the capacity of the UN for peacekeeping and conflict prevention and resolution; a treaty to ban cluster munitions; and prospects for nuclear disarmament negotiations*
- iv. promotion of multilateralism and the reform of the UN, with the next 12 months focused on adherence to international law and strengthening the UN's institutions and governance*

Cross-cutting themes in UNA-UK's policy framework for the period 2008-2011

An appreciation of gender equality and diverse cultural perspectives should be stressed across UNA-UK's four programme priorities. Over the next 12 months this should include a particular focus on raising awareness of the vital role of women in achieving the UN's objectives.